



UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
HEADQUARTERS AND SERVICE BATTALION
MARINE CORPS BASE
QUANTICO, VIRGINIA 22134-5043

BnO 1500.4
B 07-4
7 Dec 98

BATTALION ORDER 1500.4

From: Commanding Officer
To: Distribution List

Subj: PROFESSIONAL READING PROGRAM

Ref: (a) MCO P1553.4

Encl: (1) Guidelines for Book Review Contest
(2) Book Review Content and Format
(3) Sample Book Review
(4) Evaluation Sheet

1. Purpose. To implement the semi-annual book review as a part of the Professional Reading Program at Headquarters and Service Battalion, Marine Corps, Quantico, Virginia.

2. Cancellation. BnO 1510.5

3. Background. Per reference (a), the Professional Reading Program is part of the overall Professional Military Education (PME) Program in the Marine Corps. The Commandant's intent on professional reading, and reading lists are periodically published in 1500 series Marine Corps bulletins.

4. Information

a. The Commandants Reading List in the current Marine Corps Bulletin 1500 will be used as the selection list for the Headquarters and Service Battalion Professional Reading Program.

b. As part of the implementation of the Professional Reading Program, a semi-annual Book Review Contest will be held. The contest guidelines are set in enclosure (1).

c. Enclosure (2) outlines the book review content and format. Enclosure (3) is a sample book review, and enclosure (4) will be used by the Book Review Contest Board to evaluate contest submissions.

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5. Action

a. Company Commanders

(1) Implement the Professional Reading Program as part of the unit PME program.

(2) Encourage participation in the Battalion Book Review contest.

(3) Provide membership to the Book Review Contest Board outlines in enclosure (2).

b. Battalion Adjutant

(1) Provide administrative support to the senior member of the Battalion Book Review Board.

(2) Coordinate Public Affairs coverage of the book review contest winners and award presentations.

C. Battalion S-3. Exercise primary cognizance over the implementation and conduct of the Professional Reading Program.

M. E. BENNETT

DISTRIBUTION: A

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Guidelines for Book Review Contest

1. The book review contest will be held semi-annually.
2. Formal book reviews will be forwarded via the chain of command to the Commanding Officer (Attn: S-3) to arrive no later than 31 March and 30 September.
3. Book reviews will follow the format in enclosure (2).
4. Each company will submit one officer, one SNCO, one NCO, and one non-NCO book review.
5. A book review board will convene during the first week of April and October in order to judge the reviews. The board will consist of (as a minimum):
 - a. Battalion Executive Officer;
 - b. Battalion Sergeant Major;
 - c. Battalion S-3 Officer;
 - d. Company First Sergeant (TBD);
 - e. Company Representative (MSgt or above TBD).
6. The review board will meet to discuss the book reviews and select the winners.
7. The winners will be announced by the 15th of April and October and will receive the following (as a minimum):
 - a. Certificate of Commendation presented by the Commanding Officer.
 - b. A three day special liberty authorization.

ENCLOSURE (1)

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Book Review Content and Format

From: (Marine submitting review)
To: Senior Member, Battalion Book Review Board
Via: (Appropriate Chain of Command)

Subj: BOOK REVIEW OF (**TITLE OF THE BOOK**) BY (**AUTHOR**)

1. Recommendations

- a. Audience. State who should read this book and why.
- b. Actions. State what action you recommend that Marine leaders, units, Marines, or civilians take as a result of the lessons learned in this book. Briefly state your reasons for the recommendations.

2. Analysis of the Content

- a. Thesis. Identify the central, controlling idea of the book (this paragraph is essential).
- b. Synopsis. Write a one-paragraph summary of what happens in the book to develop that thesis (limit to approximately 75 words).
- c. Key Characters (or Key Concepts). Identify at least three key personalities in the text and state why they are important. If there are no characters in the text, cite key concepts. Use a subparagraph for each and link them to the thesis.
- d. Key passages. Identify three important passages and explain their significance. Use a subparagraph for each.

3. Analysis of the quality of the Book

- a. Applicability. Identify the author's intended readers. Analyze how well the author met their needs. State how applicable the text is to the Marine Corps today.
- b. Timelines. State whether the book is outdated or relevant, and explain why.
- c. Completeness. State how completely the book treats the topic. Indicate whether there is adequate support for the author's thesis and main points.

ENCLOSURE (2)

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d. Style. Judge the author's writing style. Analyze the clarity, conciseness, precision of language, logic, tone, and readability of the text.

4. Lessons Learned. Discuss in detail at least three major lessons learned from this book. Explain how these lessons are related to current military affairs or to lessons learned personally. Use a subparagraph for each.

5. Final Thought. Conclude report with final thoughts on the text and provide an interesting ending.

YOUR NAME

ENCLOSURE (2)

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Sample Book Review

Company Heading

1560
CODE
DATE

From: Sergeant Ira M. Reader 123 45 6789/1111 USMC
To: Senior Member, Battalion Book Review Board
Via: Commanding Officer, Service Company, Headquarters and
Service Battalion

Subj: **BOOK REVIEW OF PLATOON LEADER BY JAMES MCDONOUGH**

1. Recommendations

a. Audience. I recommend that every Marine leader read this book for its valuable lessons in leadership. I also recommend it for any others interested in combat leadership, small unit tactics in low-intensity conflict, or the memoirs of American soldiers in Vietnam.

b. Action. I recommend that commanders use this book along with The Red Badge of Courage, all Quiet on the Western Front and Company Commander, in officer and staff noncommissioned officer Professional Military Education classes.

2. Analysis of the Content

a. Thesis. To be a leader in combat is physically, emotionally, and intellectually demanding. Success comes from a full dedication to the mission and a sincere regard for the welfare of the soldiers.

b. Synopsis. After briefly tracing the events leading to his tour in Vietnam, McDonough describes arriving in country and joining his first unit. Then he recounts various challenges he faced as an infantry platoon leader. We see him grow from an inexperienced lieutenant to an experienced combat leader. We also see the physical hardships and the emotional, social, and ethical dilemmas that complicate his jobs.

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c. Key Characters

(1) First Lieutenant James McDonough. McDonough, the main character is an extremely adept leader. His tactical skills grow quickly, and he learns the moves and motives of his enemy, the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong. He also learns about his own troops and quickly gains control of his platoon.

(2) Sergeant John Hernandez. McDonough's first platoon sergeant, is the only long term professional NCO in the platoon. Close to retirement, he has a very cautious attitude and protects himself.

(3) Corporal John Killigan. A. savvy, courageous, and maverick young enlisted man. Killigan has the dangerous assignment of point man for patrols. As McDonough put it, "he was the best soldier among us."

d. Key Passages

(1) Page 152, McDonough's decisions to protect Killigan.

(a) "The next morning I appointed Killigan the RTO. He had continuously disobeyed my orders to stay off point. Killigan was one of the few soldiers remaining since my arrival in August. I knew that the odds were heavily stacked against the point man and Killigan had taken more than his share of risks. I would put him with me."

(b) Analysis: While common sense says to keep the best man up front, McDonough handles it differently. He makes sure his subordinates know he's in charge of the platoon. He wants them also to know he'll look after their well being, even if they don't appear concerned about themselves.

(2) Page 52. McDonough's thoughts on fear after being wounded.

(a) "Fear itself is not shameful. In fact, in the face of combat, the essence of fear would be a suspicious abnormality of character. The challenge lies in not denying fear, but in being able to function in the face of it.

(b) Analysis: The author tries to deal directly with the most stressful of combat emotions -- abject fear. He suggests a practical way of dealing with it: preparation and acceptance.

ENCLOSURE (3)

(3) Page 141. McDonough's dilemma over endangering soldiers.

(a) "It was not a simple matter of kill or be killed. I had to think of my men. I could not let them be killed because of a rigid morality on my part. But if I compromised with that morality too often, I would become little more than a war criminal, unfit to lead those men. I had to struggle to keep a sense of balance."

(b) Analysis: McDonough wants to let his soldiers know he will do everything in his power to preserve their lives. But this is not easy since he often has endangered the platoon to accomplish the mission.

3. Analysis of the Quality of the Book

a. Applicability. The book is excellent for young military leaders today. They can observe a young officer joining a new unit, building credibility and authority, handling problems, and coping with fear.

b. Timeliness. In this area of low intensity conflict, McDonough's descriptions of small unit action are very timely for young combat leaders. The lessons about leadership morality and ethics are timeless.

c. Completeness. McDonough appears to give a very thorough report of his experience. He presents more than enough situations to support his central themes about the difficulties of combat leadership. The reader gets a fairly well-rounded view of leadership challenges facing a leader in combat.

d. Style. McDonough is a fine writer, whose narrative is very clear, direct, descriptive, and fast paced. He builds suspense and expresses emotions effectively. Occasionally, his prose turns analytical and philosophical when he comments on the broader social and political dimensions of the conflict. For the most part, however, his book is a straight forward description.

4. Lessons Learned

a. Be flexible. As the experiences of Lieutenant McDonough in Vietnam show over and over, a young leader will encounter situations he never expected, so he must have an open, alert mind and remain flexible. This idea of flexibility is not only very important in this book, but also in maneuver doctrine: leaders must be flexible and show initiative.

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b. Listen and learn, but make decisions. McDonough makes it clear that when facing a tough decision, a leader should listen to and learn from others but remember the final decision is his. This lesson tracks the NAVMC 2767, User's Guide to the Marine Corps Leadership, which stresses the importance of active listening. This lesson also reinforces the principle of leadership responsibility as discussed in NAVMC 2767.

c. Learn from mistakes, but avoid repeated errors. The author seems to teach us that if young leaders make honest mistakes, they shouldn't condemn themselves, but, learn from their experiences and avoid repeating errors. This notion compliments the Army's current climate of openness and tolerance for the legitimate mistakes of junior officers.

5. Final thought. While platoon leader tells the story of one fighting unit's role in an important, but painful chapter of American military history, its lessons are timeless. It's worth the attention of leaders at all levels.

I. M. READER

ENCLOSURE (3)

EVALUATION SHEET

WRITER _____ EVALUATOR _____

Content - Organized for a single rapid reading

_____ Includes all essential information

- _____ Identifies the reference thoroughly
- _____ Provides appropriate and realistic recommendations
- _____ Bases thesis on book
- _____ Analyzes the author, content, and quality thoroughly and objectively
- _____ Discusses either key characters or key concepts
- _____ Links characters/concepts and passages to the thesis
- _____ Provides relevant lessons learned (derived from the thesis)
- _____ Supports the analyses and lessons learned with specific details and quotations

_____ Uses appropriate paragraph headers

_____ Avoids long and awkward sentences

_____ Uses correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar

_____ Uses correct format

- _____ Uses proper military dates
- _____ Uses correct from, to, and via
- _____ Indents numbers, and letter the paragraphs correctly
- _____ Uses correct margins (1 inch all around)
- _____ Uses correct signature block

Strengths _____

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Weaknesses _____

Recommendations _____

Score _____